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ABSTRACT

Focusing on three leading Indian newspapers published in New Delhi--"The Economic Times," "The Hindustan Times," and "Nav Bharat Times," a study examined the roles that journalists working for these newspapers assume, or want to assume, and how that may be related to development news production by their newspapers. A survey was distributed to all journalists working for the three newspapers (38 of 205 surveys were returned for an 18.5% response rate). Although factor analysis results indicated that having a role in the development process was considered important by respondents, there was relatively little development news in the three newspapers. Further, the development news stories tended to emphasize politics and politicians, used sources associated with the government and its agencies, and avoided sources who took critical views of the development process in India. (Two tables of data are included.) (MM)

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Journalistic Roles and the Production of Development News: A Study of Three Prestigious Newspapers in India

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ABSTRACT

Journalistic Roles and the Production of Development News: A Study of Three Prestigious Newspapers in India

Few studies have examined the relationship between journalistic roles and the production of development news. This study examines the roles that journalists working for three leading Indian newspapers assume, or want to assume, and how that may be related to development news production by their newspapers. Journalists working at The Economic Times, The Hindustan Times, and Nav Bharat Times, three leading Indian newspapers published in New Delhi, were asked to rank several journalism roles as extremely important, quite important, somewhat important or not important.

Analysis of the breakdown of responses to each question provided little conclusive evidence about the roles respondents preferred. The responses were then subjected to factor analysis to examine the underlying pattern among the responses. The factor analysis results indicate that the role labeled development journalist is considered important by the respondents.

However, there is relatively little development news in the three newspapers. Further, the development news stories tended to emphasize politics and politicians, use sources associated with the government and its agencies, and avoid sources who took critical views of the development process in India. A wide range of constraints, including news values, lack of financial and personnel resources, inadequate journalism training, and newspaper ownership patterns, is suggested as the reason for the apparent discrepancy.

International Division

Journalistic Roles and the Production of Development News: A Study of Three Prestigious Newspapers in India

The subject of numerous studies investigating the role of mass communication in national development has been an analysis of development news carried by news media. Development news is viewed here as journalistic writing about any topic that may contribute to social and economic progress at an individual or global level — or any level in between. Narinder Aggarwala and others have written that development news should examine critically, evaluate and interpret the relevance of development plans, projects, policies, problems and issues. It should indicate the disparities between plans and actual accomplishments, and include comparisons with how development is progressing in other countries and regions. It also should provide contextual and background information about the development process, discuss the impact of plans, projects, policies, problems and issues on people, and speculate about the future of development. And development news should refer to the needs of people, which may vary from country to country or from region to region, but generally includes primary needs, such as food, housing and employment; secondary needs such as transportation, energy sources and electricity; and tertiary needs such as cultural diversity, recognition and dignity.[1] This definition of development news should not be confused with the UNESCO view of "development-support

communication," which encourages communication media to mobilize the public to support the government's national development goals and act as links between the government and the public.[2]

Development news can play a vital role in social and economic transformations ongoing in many Third World countries by providing relevant information and perhaps increasing public awareness of development-related issues. Development news may immediately benefit the needy by providing information about things such as educational and employment opportunities, transportation facilities, health care and housing. Development news also may serve an agenda-setting function, which could keep development problems and needs on the minds of lobbyists, legislators, ministers and other policy and decision makers.

Despite its potential to contribute to national development, Third World news media produce little development news, according to reviews of the literature.[3] Some researchers have speculated about the reasons for the paucity of development news in Third World news media. Vilanilam suggested the lack of development news in some Indian newspapers was the result of a fascination with politics that leads journalists to ignore important development issues.[4] Ogan suggested Third World journalists have not progressed much beyond acting as public-information agents of the government.[5] Ogan, Fair and Shah suggested editors and publishers in the Third World are reluctant to use development news and reporters may not be willing to write more critically and analytically about development issues.[6]

These studies suggest journalists in Third World countries may not be interested in producing development news. However, because the

studies focus on news content and not on the people who produced it, little can be said conclusively about the role journalists perform, or want to perform, in the development process in Third World countries.

The present study will examine the responses to survey questions about journalistic roles provided by Indian journalists working at three prestige newspapers in India — The Economic Times, a English-language financial daily; Nav Bharat Times, a Hindi-language, general-interest daily; and The Hindustan Times, an English-language, general-interest daily.

Because the sample of respondents for this study is relatively small and non-random, generalizations cannot be made about all Indian journalists, much less about all Third World journalists. But the results may provide some clues about how journalists working in developing countries view their role in the development process. Despite its limitations, this study may provide a starting point for more comprehensive work in this area.

The Economic Times, Nav Bharat Times and The Hindustan Times

In 1984, 495 daily newspapers in India had a total circulation of 14,843,000. The Economic Times, The Hindustan Times, and Nav Bharat Times accounted for about 4.3 percent of the total circulation of all dailies. The Economic Times and The Hindustan Times accounted for 9 percent of the total circulation of all English-language dailies and Nav Bharat Times, for nearly 10 percent of the total circulation of all Hindi-language dailies. The three newspapers are among the most

widely read in India. In addition, these newspapers are said to be among the most prestigious. The English dailies generally are considered more influential than the Hindi daily, but all three are said to play an important agenda-setting role among their audiences.[7] For the English dailies, the audience includes government officials, business executives, industrialists and students. For the Nav Bharat Times, the audience includes not only some political and economic elites, but also merchants, industrial workers, some laborers, and those working in the service sector.[8] Thus, much of what appears in these three dailies may be known to a large number of people representing a wide range of social and economic backgrounds.

Review of Some Relevant Studies

Many studies have examined journalists and their work in developing countries. Some of these examined various characteristics, demographics, and the socioeconomic status of journalists.[9] Others have examined the transfer of Western professional norms, organizational standards and bureaucratic constraints to Third World media organizations.[10] A large number of studies have examined the level of professionalism among journalists in developing countries.[11]

However, only a few have examined the roles journalists assume in developing countries. Three such studies of journalists in Nigeria, Algeria and India are reviewed here.

Dare examined the role conceptions held by 118 staffers of the News Agency of Nigeria. He found 60 percent of the respondents

thought it was important to develop intellectual and cultural tastes of the audience, indicating a desire to assume the role of an educator. He also found 80 percent of the journalists thought it was important to investigate government claims, indicating that they don't view themselves as passive transmitters of government policies and positions. Dare concluded that NAN staffers assume a distinctly activist role. NAN staffers viewed themselves not as mere purveyors of news and information "but as nation builders, teachers, watchdogs, representatives of the people, development promoters and social conscience."[12]

The roles assumed by Algerian journalists was one of the issues examined by Kirat.[13] His survey of 75 Algerian journalists revealed that many agree to a large extent with the overall communication policies of the government. Although fairly large proportions of the sample said it was important to investigate government claims and criticize the government when needed, large proportions of journalists also agreed with the government's notion of a journalist's role. At least about half the respondents said a journalist's role included counteracting foreign propaganda, educating and forming a modern Algerian citizen, enhancing socialist goals, and enhancing Islamic values, which also are all goals of the Algerian government.

In a study of 256 Indian journalists, Eapen found that "there was no lack of awareness of the service role of journalism."[14] Nearly all the respondents said the job journalists do is essential to society. About 36 percent of the respondents said the role of a journalist was to educate, share opinions and guide readers.

All three studies indicate that journalists in developing countries may see service to the country as an important responsibility. However, the studies reveal little about journalistic roles in the context of producing development news, which is one important way journalists could carry out what they perceive is their responsibility to serve their country.

Method

A survey asking about the roles journalists perform, or are expected to perform, was distributed to 205 journalists. The sample was not randomly drawn. Rather, all journalists working for New Delhi editions of The Economic Times, The Hindustan Times, and Nav Bharat Times received surveys. This convenience sampling strategy was used in an earlier study by the author to facilitate comparisons between the survey responses and the content produced by the news organizations for which the respondents worked.[15] The surveys were delivered in person or sent through the mail along with return postage. The surveys were self administered. When completed surveys were not forthcoming, the researcher personally met the journalists in an effort to get completed surveys. Also, the researcher left behind several dozen surveys with a contact in New Delhi so that he could distribute a second wave of surveys to journalists who had not responded during the first wave. A total of 38 surveys was returned for a response rate of 18.5 percent.

By most standards this is a poor response rate to any type of survey. However, in the context of mass communication survey research conducted in India, the response rate is fairly good. For example, in 1982 the Second Press Commission, a quasi-governmental body investigating the Indian press, sent 4,048 questionnaires to editors and publishers and received 194 completed questionnaires for a response rate of 4.79 percent. The commission also sent a questionnaire to the editors of 13,253 Indian periodicals and received 283 completed questionnaires for a response rate of only 2.14 percent.

Results

Of the 38 journalists who returned a completed questionnaire, 32 (84.2%) were male and six (15.8%) were female. The average age of these journalists was 37.4 years. They had been with the organization for which they were currently working for an average of 10.4 years. They had been professional journalists for an average of 15.1 years. All the respondents had a college degree but only 21.6 percent had formal journalism training (i.e. in a college or journalism institute).

Table 1 shows respondents' reactions to 16 questions about the role journalists perform or are expected to perform.

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Table 1 about here
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Some of the responses seem to indicate that some Indian journalists may have a favorable orientation towards producing development news. For example, 86.9 percent of the respondents feel it is extremely important or quite important to investigate claims made by the government. Much of development journalism is investigative in nature and in India, where the government directs most development efforts, a willingness to investigate government claims may be a key to producing effective development news. Also, about 94 percent of the respondents said it was extremely important or quite important to discuss development needs. This response is especially important because the journalists work for prestige newspapers, which are regularly read by decision makers. By discussing development needs in the prestige press, development issues are more likely to stay on the agendas of decision makers and be acted upon. Further, about 68 percent of the respondents felt it was quite important or extremely important to discuss national development as a process rather than only as an event. Writing about development as a process requires more time than writing about events such as a ribbon-cutting ceremony or a speech initiating a development project. This response indicates the journalists are willing to the spend the time required to investigate the background and context of development issues and treat them as on-going concerns rather than one-time events.

However, other responses seem to indicate that the journalists do not have a favorable orientation towards producing development news. For example, to produce investigative, critical stories on development issues, journalists may need to assume an adversarial posture with government officials or agencies. However, only 37.5 percent of the

respondents felt it was extremely important or quite important to be an adversary of the government. In addition, in a country where development efforts are mainly government-controlled, journalists may need to act as a link between the government and the public. But only about 44 percent of the respondents felt this was an extremely important or quite important part of their job.

So far, there is little conclusive evidence about journalistic roles in the context of development news production. To examine the question further, the responses were subjected to factor analysis to determine the underlying patterns among the journalists' beliefs about the roles they perform, or want to perform.

Table 2 shows that four distinct factors emerged from the data. Each factor had a eigenvalue of 1.0 or greater. Items were considered to load on a factor if the loading on that factor was .50 or greater and the loading on other factors was .35 or smaller. The first factor consisting of the items about acting as a link between the government and public, speculating about the future of development, supporting and advancing the government's development goals, and discussing national, regional and local development needs can be called a "development journalist" role. The role appears to be a mix of the Aggarwala and UNESCO views of development news.

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Table 2 about here
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The second factor, consisting of the items about putting news in a proper context, and helping readers understand the motives of persons and organizations can be called an "educator" role. A third factor,

consisting of the items about discussing national policy while it's still being formulated, and getting information to the public as quickly as possible can be called a "surveillor" role, which seems to emphasize providing news in a timely fashion. A fourth factor, consisting of the items about reporting stories only when facts are verified, and concentrating on news of interest to the widest possible public can be called a "professionalist" role, which appears to emphasize two traditional journalistic conventions.

A reliability check on the four-item "development journalist" factor resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .63, which is well below the accepted minimum of .80 required for a reliable scale. Because of the low reliability coefficient and because it made sense conceptually, this factor was broken down into two separate roles: "development journalist," consisting of the items about speculating about the future of development, and discussing national, regional and local development needs; and "development-support journalist," consisting of the items about acting as a link between the government and the public, and supporting and advancing the government's development goals.

To get an idea about which of the two development roles was <u>most</u> favored by the journalists, each was converted into a four-point scale by combining the items comprising each role. The four-point scales represented the importance respondents attached to each role. Each scale was divided into halves — the top half representing extremely important and quite important, and the lower half representing somewhat important and not really important. The role respondents

favored most was determined by examining the proportion of respondents in the top half of the scales.

The results show that the "development journalist" role is favored over the "development-support journalist" role. A fairly large proportion of journalists (about 63%) rated the role extremely important or quite important, while only 37.5% of the journalists felt that the "development-support journalist" role was extremely important or quite important. It appears that most respondents do not want to report development news by acting as links between the government and the public, and supporting government development plans, as suggested by UNESCO. But, apparently, some journalists in India do want to undertake the investigative, in-depth, evaluative and critical reporting of the development process, as suggested by Aggarwala and others.

However, despite the support for the "development journalist" role, in an earlier study by the author, a content analysis of the newspapers for which the surveyed journalists work, revealed relatively little development news. In that study, only news items that met at least one of a set of ten development news reporting criteria were classified as development news.[16] The criteria were based on the definition of development news provided earlier. According to this standard, only about 16 percent of the 2,383 news items examined met at least one of these criteria and were classified as development news. Further, the development news stories tended to emphasize politics and politicians, use sources associated with the government and its agencies, and avoid sources who took critical views of the development process in India.

Conclusions

It was suggested in the author's previous study that the lack of development news was more a result of a wide array of institutional and organizational constraints on journalistic work than of a lack of importance attached to a "development journalist" role by Indian journalists. This study has shown — at least for a sample of Indian journalists at three elite newspapers — that some journalits do believe they have an important role to perform in the development process. What is called for now is: (1) studies involving larger and more representative samples to determine the extent of support for the "development journalist" role among Indian journalists, and (2) studies of institutional and organizational constraints on Indian journalism to determine the impact they have on development news production. A study of these constraints should include an examination of journalistic tradition that view politics and politicians as more newsworthy than development processes; journalism training (both formal and in the newsroom) that often reinforces that view of newsworthiness; a lack of financial and personnel resources that prevent news organizations from covering development news as extensively as they may want; government use of its newsprint allocation and advertising policies as tools of indirect censorship; and conglomerate ownership of newspapers.[17]

Notes

1 Narinder K. Aggarwala, "What is Development News?" Journal of Communication 29(2):181-182 (1979); Aggarwala "A New Journalism," Intermedia 8(1):26-27 (1980); P.R.R. Sinha, "Review of Asian Media Performance and Activity in the '70s," Media Asia 8(1):49-54 (1981); Sinha "Towards a Definition of Development Communication," in Peter Haberman and Guy De Fontgalland, eds., Development Communication: Rhetoric and Reality (Singapore: AMIC, 1978), pp.18-28.; Everett Rogers, "Passing of the Dominant Paradigm," in Everett Rogers, ed., Communications and Development: Critical Perspectives (Beverley Hills: Sage, 1976), pp.121-148; Erskine Childers, "Taking Humans Into Account," Media Asia 3(2):87-90 (1976).

2 Christine L. Ogan "Development Journalism/Communication: The Status of the Concept," Gazette 29:3-13 (1982).

3 Hemant Shah, "The Production of Development News by Four Indian News Organizations." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University 1987; Jo Ellen Fair, "A Meta Research Case Study of Development Journalism," Journalism Quarterly (forthcoming).

4 John Vilanilam, "Development News in Two Leading Indian Newspapers," Media Asia 2(1):37-40 (1975), p. 40.

5 Christine L. Ogan "Development Journalism/Communication: The Status of the Concept," Gazette 29:3-13 (1982).

6 Christine L. Ogan, Jo Ellen Fair and Hemant Shah, "'A Little Good News': The Treatment of Development News in Selected Third World Newspapers." Gazette 33:173-191 (1984).

7 Mazrahul Haque, "News content homogeneity in Indian dailies." Journalism Quarterly 63(4):827-833 (Winter 1987).

8 Operations Research Group, National Readership Study II. (Baroda, India: Author, 1978).

9 Nwabu Nwaneve Mgbemena, "Nigerian Journalists: A Study of Their Demographic Characteristics and Professional Orientation." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Texas, 1980; Abdulkader T.M. Tash, "A Profile of Professional Journalists Working for the Saudi Daily Press." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1983.

10 Rita Cruise O'Brien, "Professionalism in Broadcasting in Developing Countries," Journal of Communication 27(2):151-154 (1977); Peter Golding, "Media Professionalism in the Third World: The Transfer of an Ideology," in James Curran, Michael Gurevitch and Janet Woolacott, eds., Mass Communications and Society (London: Constable, 1977), pp. 290-308.

11 Jack McLeod and Ramona Rush, "Professionalization of Latin American and U.S. Journalists," Journalism Quarterly 46:583-90 (Fall 1969); Dario Menanteau Horta, "Professionalism of Journalists in Santiago de Chile," Journalism Quarterly 44:715-26 (Winter 1967); Lawrence Day, "The Latin American Journalist: A Tentative Profile," Journalism Quarterly 45:509-515 (Fall 1968); Idowu Sobowale, "Characteristics and Professioanl Attitudes of Nigerian Journalists." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Syracuse University, 1978.

[12] Olatunji Dare, "The News Agency of Nigeria: A Study of its Impact on the Flow of News and the Role Conception of its Staffers." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1983, p. 187.

[13] Mohamed Kirat, "The Algerian Newspeople: A Study of Their Backgrounds, Professional Orientations and Working Conditions." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1987.

[14] Kadamattu E. Eapen, "Journalism as a Profession In India: A study of Two States and Two Cities." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1969, p. 169.

[15] Shah, op. cit.

[16] Shah, op. cit. The ten development news reporting criteria were:

(1) Does the item emphasize development processes rather than events?

(2) Does the item contain content critical of development projects, plans, policies, problems or issues?

(3) Does the item discuss the relevance of development projects, plans, policies, problems or issues to national, regional or local needs?

(4) Does the item provide contextual or background information about development projects, plans, policies, problems or issues?

(5) Does the item speculate about the future in relation development needs?

(6) Does the item discuss the impact of projects, plans, policies, problems or issues on people?

(7) Does the item discuss development processes in other regions or countries?

(8) Does the item compare the subject with original goals?

(9) Does the item compare the subject with government claims?

(10) Does the item make any references to development needs of the people?

[17] Shah, op. cit.

Table 1. Responses to Questions About Journalistsic Roles.

	1	2	3	4	n	$\bar{X}$
1. Get info to the public quickly.	86.8	10.5	2.6	-	38	1.15
2. Provide analysis and interpretation.	35.1	54.1	10.8	-	37	1.75
3. Provide entertainment and relaxation.	5.9	29.4	41.2	23.5	34	2.82
4. Investigate claims made by government.	47.4	39.5	10.5	2.6	38	1.68
5. Report only when facts can be verified.	56.8	29.7	2.7	10.8	37	1.67
6. Concentrate on news of widest interest.	50.0	31.6	10.5	7.9	38	1.76
7. Discuss national policies.	32.4	54.1	5.4	8.1	37	1.89
8. Develop intellectual and cultural interests of the public.	27.0	37.8	29.7	5.4	37	2.13
9. Be an adversary of the government.	9.4	28.1	12.5	50.0	32	3.03
10. Put the news in the proper context.	44.1	44.1	11.8	0.0	34	1.67
11. Help people under- motives of people and orgs.	36.1	55.6	8.3	-	36	1.72
12. Support and advance development goals of gov.	26.5	20.6	32.4	20.6	34	2.47
13. Act as link between gov and public.	20.6	23.5	32.4	23.5	34	2.58
14. Discuss development needs.	36.1	58.3	2.8	2.8	36	1.72
15. Speculate about future of national development.	5.7	48.6	25.7	20.0	35	2.60
16. Emphasize process of development.	21.6	45.9	24.3	8.1	37	2.18

Table 2. Journalistic Roles of Print Journalists as Determined by Factor Analysis.

Role	Factor Loading *
Development Journalist	
Act as a link between government and public.	.80
Speculate about future of development.	.69
Support and advance government's development goals.	.64
Discuss national, local, regional development needs.	.58
Educator	
Put news in proper context.	.79
Help readers understand motives.	.86
Surveillor	
Discuss national policy while it's being formulated.	.89
Get information to public as quickly as possible.	.78
Professionalist	
Report stories only when facts can be verified.	.81
Concentrate on news of interest to widest audience.	.70

* Factor loadings based on principal components analysis with varimax rotation and four factors specified.